

“While We Wait”
Jeremiah 33:14-16; Luke 21:25-36
Sermon, 12/2/2018

Are we there yet? Anyone here ever hear that question? With six grown children and ten grandchildren in various stages of growing up, I know I have. It has been asked more times than I care to remember. It has been asked out of boredom, out of excitement, and out of anticipation. More than once it has been asked repeatedly in a matter of minutes. The answer my children and grandchildren often heard was a variation of ***obviously not***. None of them liked that answer. Nor did they like the following comments. ***You just have to wait. We will be there when we get there.*** The good news is that when we did get there, all was forgiven, they were where they wanted to be, and they were happy.

It is not an easy thing to wait. It is especially not easy when it feels as if we will never get there, and afraid of what comes when we do.

Jeremiah, an Old Testament prophet who appears in about 626BC, essentially speaks to a people asking: ***are we there yet?*** He gives them a similar response: ***Obviously not! You just have to wait.*** At the time he is writing, Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, is invading Jerusalem. There is fear and worry among the people. Many of them are despairing and questioning their faith in a God, who they believe has promised to always protect them. They understandably find it difficult to hope. Into this situation comes the prophecy of Jeremiah:

The days are coming, says the Lord, when I fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: “The Lord is our righteousness.”

These are words of hope to an anxious people. These also are words that speak clearly of the rise of messianic hope, the hope that God will send a specific king to restore Israel to its rightful place in the world. We hear their echo in Luke’s gospel this morning which ends with the promise: ***Your redemption is drawing near.*** When will this happen? ***Are we there yet?*** We feel the pressing need all around us? We cry with the psalmist, ***how long, O Lord?*** We can almost hear the response: ***You just have to wait. We will be there when we get there.***

Today most Christian churches begin the season of Advent, a season of waiting for ***a righteous branch to spring up***. The season lasts only four weeks and then the churches celebrate the birth of that ***righteous branch***. For Christians, the branch has a name. It is Jesus. It is Emanuel, which is to say it is a celebration of a God who is with us. Without question, outside the institutional church, the season of Advent, the season of waiting for ***a righteous branch to spring up***, is a whole lot longer than four weeks. Much of the world yet waits for salvation, for peace with justice for all, for an end to starvation, an end to violence, an end to isms of every kind, an end to hatred and discrimination. Much of the world waits, even as it asks: ***Are we there yet?*** Much of the world knows that we are not there yet, even as it hopes to be alive to see a reason to stop asking, a reason to see the possibility of hope, as it journeys toward the fulfillment of: ***We will be there when we get there***.

Clearly we are not there yet. We will ***just have to wait***. While we wait we wonder what to do as we wait. Jeremiah, knowingly or not, suggests an answer to our question. He says: ***The Lord is our righteousness***. Jeremiah understands the relationship, the covenant, that Yahweh has with Israel. He knows that being in relationship requires reciprocity. If God is righteous, any meaningful relationship with Him requires righteous people. His awareness is based on a deeply rooted belief that a righteous God requires righteous people. The not so subtle implication is that as we wait for the realization of the world as God dreams it, we have to work to hasten the day it will happen.

We know Jesus held fast to this belief, always sensing the kingdom at hand, even as he worked for it to come. He taught that day we long for, the day of righteousness, would be realized when we linked our love for God with our love for our neighbor. He taught that a relationship with the divine requires a relationship with the human. Jesus taught combining the two loves is the path to the destination we await. He calls that destination the ðkingdom of Godö. It is a reality that is attainable and already ðat hand.ö It is discovered whenever love of God is paired with love of neighbor.

Which brings us back to ***The Lord (who) is our righteousness*** and ***Are we there yet?*** Israel did not understand righteousness as we do. It had nothing to do with obeying rules and laws, as such. It had everything to do with knowing the necessary dynamics of being in relationship.

For more times than I can list, I have counseled couples as they prepared for marriage. It was, and still is, one of my favorite pastoral duties. As part of every preparation, I ask, "What will you do the first time you don't even want to speak to

your spouse?ø Invariably most couples deny that could ever happen. A knowing smile often appears, as this pastor (who has been blessed with two wonderful wives) suggests that there will come a day when they understand the question. And it is then that I ask them to consider the part of the marriage vows that include the words: ***for better or for worse***. The words are there for a reason.

The point is clear. Love, righteousness, justice, cannot be understood apart from relationships. If any of them have any inherent meaning, the relationship, not the participants, set the rules. Love, righteousness, justice, are of a whole. The more they are a part of us, the more our relationships reflect them, the more certain we become. ***We are almost there***. The more we understand ***The Lord (who) is our righteousness*** in this way, the more likely we get an answer to our question: ***Are we there yet?***

God has told you...what is good; and what does the Lord require of but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God
(Micah 6:8)

Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.
(Amos 5:24)

You shall love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind...and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:37-40)

Are we there yet? Obviously not.

The journey continues. We know what to do while we wait for it to be over. ***Lord, haste the day when our faith shall be sight***. As we journey through Advent may God's righteousness be our righteousness and as we do so may the song in our hearts be: ***It is well with our souls***. We still have a way to go, but we can hasten the day ***when our faith shall be sight***. Ready to take a ride? The trip is worth it.